

# Picture perfection

Professional golf course photographer, Eric Hepworth, offers some advice to those BIGGA members keen to maximise their chances in the 2011 BIGGA Golf Photographic Competition



Alwoodley.  
In Eric's opinion, this is the best course in Yorkshire. In this portrait format picture, Eric made good use of the interesting cloud formations and shadows over the bunker.



**Since the inaugural BIGGA Golf Photographic Competition in 2006, it is generally agreed that the overall standard of entry has risen year on year and identified a huge reservoir of photographic expertise among the BIGGA Membership.**

There can be few areas of technology which have advanced in recent years as much as photography, with cameras developing almost on a weekly basis.

From the early days of digital photography when we were amazed that pictures could be taken without the use of film, to the rapid climb from one megapixel cameras, and memory cards that can hold a dozen images, to now when even mobile phones can boast 12 megapixel cameras and memory cards can hold hundreds of pictures at any one time.

High quality cameras can now fit into the smallest pocket on the tightest pair of jeans and there is rarely an occasion when someone isn't able to record a moment.

But for all the technology, there is still an art to taking photographs and the more knowledge and skill you can bring to complement the quality of equipment now available,

ABOVE: Royal North Devon.

This panoramic photo illustrates the advantage of a hole being laid out North to South, the gorgeous evening light casting long shadows across the fairway.

the more chance you will have in the 2011 BIGGA Photographic Competition.

To that end, professional golf course photographer, Eric Hepworth, one of the judges of our competition, took some time out to talk about golf course photography and offer some advice to those

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Eric Hepworth

many greenkeepers who now carry a camera as an essential element of their day-to-day kit.

“The most important thing to think about when taking a golf course photograph is the light. You can't take a good course picture without good light,” explained Eric, who has well over 300 courses in his library.

“Poor light can't even save images of Augusta National. You've either got good light or you haven't. You can't generate it in Photoshop!”

So what is good light in photographic terms?

“I watch the weather forecasts, looking for frontal systems. Look on the Met Office website rather than TV, as their forecasts have been dumbed down. Ideally your visit must be timed when the front has just passed through. That is when the best possible light is available.”

Chasing the best possible conditions has seen Eric spending long periods of time waiting, just waiting, for the right conditions.

“I've often said you don't have to be the best golf course photographer in the world, just the most patient.”

The longest he can recall spending at a course waiting for the ideal conditions was a fortnight when at Carnoustie, shooting a hole-by-hole guide for the 1999 Open Championship.

“Golf course photography must be the only profession where you open the curtains and decide if you are going to go to work!” said Eric.

“I get to know my landladies so well, they are all on my Christmas card list!”



“If the weather is bad, I tend to go swimming. You need to be in fair shape to carry the huge amount of equipment I take on the course. I’ll often re-visit my notes and make sure that my cameras and lenses are clean and working correctly too.”

“On many occasions though, I have returned home with nothing, as the weather just hasn’t co-operated. There is no point in taking pictures that are not going to show the course off to its best, I would only throw them away and tear myself a strip off for taking them in the first place.”

“If the light is there, obviously, you must be able to make the most of it. Taking pictures in the middle of the day is a big no-no because the sun is high and the shadows are straight down.”

“The best times are when the sun is just coming up early in the morning or in the evening when the sun is going down. This means the shadows give great definition to any shot you take.”

There are some courses which are easier to photograph than others and Eric carries around a compass which identifies where the sun will rise and set at any given time of the year.

“Courses that are set up north to south are much easier to photo-

graph than those which run from east to west because when it’s the right time to take the pictures, the sun is shining across most of the holes, creating superb shadows; while east to west, the sun is in the wrong place for most holes, when it’s the right time to take the pictures,” said Eric, who always takes time to plan out where to position himself in advance for shots of particular holes and marks them on a Strokesaver.

But don’t panic though if your course is laid out east to west course. You can take competition-winning pictures, it just takes a little more effort.

“You have to try and engineer an angle. Rather than just standing in the 18th fairway, pointing at the green with the clubhouse in the background, you would have to move left or right to create an angle and bring out the shadows on undulations and around bunkers etc.”

The other principle element of photography is the framing and there are rules that you should think about before you take your picture.

“You can ruin a fantastically lit picture just by the wrong choice of framing.”



**ABOVE:** Royal County Down. To get the best of the evening light, be there in mid June, as the sun sets behind the mountain at any other time of the year.

**BELOW:** Aberdovey. Against a cloudless sky, this picture would not be anywhere near as dramatic.



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Eric Hepworth



Pyle and Kenfig; example of how  
The Rule of Thirds works, with  
the point of interest  
(the green) roughly a third in

One of the main things to consider is to apply the Rule of Thirds to your picture.

“The Rule of Thirds is something which has come down from landscape artists like Constable. In simple terms, the points of interest should be located in one of the four intersections of the picture a third in and not in the centre of the picture.

“It makes the picture more pleasing on the eye.”

That’s not to say it is a rigid rule and there are many occasions when a picture which doesn’t abide by it can look absolutely stunning but there is no doubt that taking the Rule of Thirds into account can help improve your photography.

When it comes to equipment, Eric is of the opinion that the advent of digital photography has been a double edged sword.

“Digital photographs are now so easy to take, that people are not taking time over what they shoot.

“If they don’t like the picture they just bin it. In the days when we used film, we were conscious of how much it cost and had that in mind when we pressed the shutter.

“Due to digital’s simplicity, millions of people who previously would not have dreamed of using a camera, are taking pictures and that’s a great thing but, on the flip side, people are not thinking enough about how to make their pictures better because it is such a straight forward process.”

If you are considering taking your photography seriously and are looking to do more than you can with a compact or mobile phone camera, Eric would point you to a digital SLR which gives the option of allowing different lenses for different occasions.

“I would recommend going for one which has a full frame sensor but unfortunately they are more expensive. If you look at the photographers at football matches these days, they don’t need enormous lenses anymore.

“The cameras they often use now, have sensors which multiply the image, in some instances by as much as 1.6 times. The camera now does some of the work of a long lens.

“However, this principle also prevents getting the best out of a wide angle lens, which is the favourite of golf course photographers. A standard 50mm lens fitted to a camera with a 1.6 times sensor, becomes an 80 mm, not wide enough to use around a green.



One of Eric’s oldest and favourite pictures, again exemplifying the rule of thirds. He has tried to re-create this picture a number of times but failed.



To view Eric’s extensive library of golf course pictures visit: [www.hepworthgolfphotography.com](http://www.hepworthgolfphotography.com)

**Eric’s Tips**

Don’t take pictures in the middle of the day.

Take pictures first thing in the morning or in the evening.

Swot up on the Rule of Thirds and work this into your pictures.

Rake the bunker. Don’t have big hoof prints in the bunker and then take the rake out of shot.

If you are shooting in the morning, make sure you don’t have footprints in the dew where you are hoping to shoot.

Have a look at the file size and resolution of the picture you are taking. A wonderful shot which is too small or in low resolution, is useless.

Always make sure your lens is clean. If you are pointing into light, any spec of dust will create flare.

If you can, take step ladders with you, so you can add a little height to your pictures.

If you are intending to take pictures on a golf course which is not your own, always seek permission first.

*All about Eric...*

**Eric started off life as an underground electrician at Hickleton Main Colliery with photography very much a hobby.**

“I got to know sports photographer, Mark Newcombe, through my aunt who worked for the Barnsley Chronicle, and I invited Mark along to an exhibition of my sports photography at the Cooper Gallery in the town.

“Mark said he liked some of them and enquired if I would consider photographing football for him at weekends. I was in dream world! I began taking pictures of teams in the old First Division, travelling to Manchester United, Leeds, Tottenham, Aston Villa etc. I thought this was wonderful.”

With the demise of the mining industry, Eric took advantage of a redundancy package which included a redeployment scheme which saw 12 months salary paid to any future employer and Eric joined Mark at Visions in Golf full time, taking pictures for the recently launched Fore! magazine.

“It was a great apprenticeship and I hugely appreciated the faith that Mark placed in me. It was a massive learning curve though. One day I was a mining electrician and the next, I was trying to pull off being a fully fledged professional photographer. When I went freelance in 1995, I was very fortunate to be asked to photograph the hole by hole collection of photographs of The Old Course for that year’s

Open Championship. Thankfully, following that stroke of luck, I’ve done every Open since, re-visiting each venue to take account of any changes to the course.”

Apart from the Open, Eric also takes commissions for any golf club wishing to have a top quality portfolio of pictures for display or marketing purposes.

“Today, golf clubs are striving to increase their membership and to attract more visitors. All too often though, they are trying to promote their most valuable asset to prospective members or visiting golfers by relying on pictures that have been taken by a member who is a keen amateur photographer. The Internet, whether clubs embrace it or not, is where these potential vital sources of income can be attracted, by having good photographs of their course featured on the club’s website.

“I have often been contacted by golf magazine editors seeking pictures of esteemed golf courses, after receiving pictures from the club that were unusable. Sadly many Secretary/Managers, before they were informed by the editor, thought the photographs acceptable.

Consider this scenario. If your daughter was soon to be married, would you ask around for someone who was handy with a camera or would you contact a professional to provide the very best pictures for your daughter’s special day. Golf clubs which are often million pound businesses, are relying on amateur pictures to promote themselves.”